

THE IDEALS OF THE CHINESE REPUBLIC

BY DR. CHIH MENG

Associate Director of the China Institute in America, New York

CHINA'S political experience is as long as her history. Contrary to the popular conception in the West that China is changeless and unchanging, the history of China is a fascinating story of a nation which has been attempting under varying conditions to live contentedly.

The legendary emperors Yao and Shun, and Wen and Wu represent a very old political ideal; that is, the ideal ruler does nothing, and yet the nation becomes contented and peaceful. His influence comes from what he is, not from what he does. Yao was the classical example of *jen* ("benevolence") personified. He was the parent-ruler who loved his subjects and looked after them as his children. He selected Shun from among the common people because of the latter's honesty, ability, and well-known filial piety. Both Yao and Shun regarded their rule as a responsibility entrusted to them by Heaven, not as a personal or family affair. Both selected not their sons, but natural leaders whom the people admired, to succeed them as rulers.

Hence King Wen of the Chou dynasty was, according to Chinese tradition, the perfect ruler because he did not seek to rule, but the people made him their leader because of his benevolence and exemplary life. Wu, son of King Wen, used force to overthrow a despot. K'ung-tse, commenting on the two rulers, said, "The music of Wen is perfect beauty and goodness, but that of Wu perfect beauty and not perfect goodness." The name Wen also means "culture," or "civilian," and the name Wu means "force" or "military."

K'ung-tse, or Latinized Confucius (551-479 B.C.) and his disciples might have created these legendary heroes in order to make their political teachings vivid and impressive after the fashion of ancient teachers. Their teachings might be characterized as enlightened political paternalism. The most brilliant expositor and advocate of this school of thought was Meng-tse, Latinized Mencius (372-289 B.C.) who molded philosophy into definite doctrines and concrete policies.

Meng-tse was traveling among the feudal rulers whom he attempted to convert into his political disciples. Once he had an audi-

ence with King Huei of Liang. King Huei asked, "Sir, what can you teach me to obtain profit for my kingdom?" Meng-tse replied, "Your Majesty, why profit? The only way to rule is according to benevolence and righteousness." He went on to explain the difference between a rule by profit and force and one by benevolence and righteousness. The profit-motive gave rise to mutual exploitation, and force could only obtain involuntary and hence temporary obedience on the part of the people, while benevolence and righteousness inspired voluntary loyalty and mutual confidence, which naturally created a parent-child relationship between the ruler and the ruled that led to lasting contentment. He was among the earliest philosophers to make a distinction between the right to rule and the right to be ruled. About such rights he said, "In a nation the people are the most important, traditions and rituals next, and the ruler is the least important." When asked whether he considered the overthrow of a ruler by his subject as treason, he replied, "For a subject to overthrow a good ruler is treason, but to remove a despot is a benevolent act to the nation." In asserting the rights of the people, he was restating an existing doctrine of the mandate of Heaven, which was, "Heaven sees as the people see, and Heaven hears as the people hear." This means that as long as the ruler regarded the welfare of the people he had a right to rule, but as soon as he disregarded the welfare of the people, he lost his right to rule. This doctrine took root at an early age of the nation. In their history the Chinese people have exercised their right many times in changing their rulers and dynasties that lost the mandate of Heaven.

The people had the right to be ruled benevolently, according to Meng-tse, but not all of them had the right to rule because some were created to exercise their intelligence, and some were created to exercise their strength. "Let those who exercise their intelligence be fed by those who exercise their strength." "The virtue of the morally superior man is like the wind. The virtue of the common man is like the grass. The grass leans towards the direction of the wind."

The rulers should share with the people their pleasures and amusements. Taxation should be flexible. Surplus grain should be stored up in years of plenty for the relief of the people in time of famine. They should protect agriculture so that the people could sow and reap properly. They should regulate fishing and wood-cutting

so that fish and wood would be plentiful for all time, and no one would be hungry and cold, and old people might be free from labor and enjoy meat and silk.

From the time of K'ung-tse to the time of Meng-tse there developed two extreme schools of political thought—the "anarchy" of Lao-tse and the "communism" of Mo-tse. Lao-tse condemned any attempt at interfering with natural pursuit of happiness. According to him, government causes rebellion, law causes crimes, and organization causes quarrels. His utopia was one in which

Though between neighbors they hear
the barking of their dogs and the crowing
of their cocks, they should each live and
die and care not even to see one another.

On the other hand, Mo-tse might be considered as the Chinese Jesus Christ. He would have liked to transform the world into one family, so all people would love one another, bear one another's burdens, and become one another's keepers.

The K'ung-Meng school gained ascendancy because it adhered to the golden mean, also because it embodied some of the most important principles of the two extreme schools. On certain principles all three schools were agreed. They all agreed that the development of man was the most important, while the state was more or less of a necessary evil. They all recognized that force was an undesirable instrument of national and international policy. Lao-tse was, of course, opposed to all forms of coercion. In editing the *Annals of Spring and Autumn*, K'ung-tse did not recognize a single righteous war. Mo-tse advanced as one of his three great doctrines the abolition of soldiery. Meng-tse said, "In an ideal international order the less virtuous nations voluntarily follow the more virtuous. Otherwise, the less powerful will be compelled to serve the more powerful."

The result was that there evolved during the centuries since K'ung-Meng a political philosophy and attitude on the part of scholars and people, that helped to hold together the largest empire for the longest period, an empire of a population which has grown from about fifty millions at the beginning of the Christian era to about four hundred and fifty millions at present, and of an area larger than the United States or the continent of Europe. The actual Chinese empire is larger than the population and territory of China proper. Long before the expansion of England into the British Em-

pire, the Chinese by peaceful penetration had spread to all parts of the world. The cultural expansion of China has been even more far-reaching. In fact, a great part of eastern Asia has been during various periods more or less Chinese in the sense of the ascendancy of the Chinese language, literature, and philosophy.

Curious enough, the political strength of China has become under modern conditions political weakness. In the first place, the Chinese political attitude is inclined to decentralization. Except for short periods of great emergency and foreign dominance, the Central Government has always been a symbol of cultural unity rather than the center of political power. Even the appointees of the Central Government have not much to do with the life of the people. There are a few highly organized bureaucratic municipal governments in China, but by far the great majority of communities have retained the old method of governing, though many of them have adopted new names such as "boards," "councils," and "committees." Take, for example, a community which I know best. It is a town of about 2,500 people, an average rural community. It has a magistrate appointed by the Central Government. He has four policemen in modern uniforms; but they have very little to do. They have practically nothing to do with schools, shops, markets, and the maintenance of public buildings, the most important of which is the dyke. They very seldom are called upon to enforce the law and to try lawsuits. The actual governing body is the gentry, a body of men who are not organized and who have no legal status but who, by virtue of their learning and prestige proven by the lapse of time, have been recognized as leaders by the community. They serve without pay. It is they who assess the people for funds to keep the schools (modern schools) going and the dykes repaired. They are usually called upon to arbitrate disputes over property, and sometimes to adjudicate criminal offenses. Cases involving public morals are rare and violent crimes almost unknown.

This leads to the question of social control. The source of control does not come from political power, but from ethical principles. For example, the traditional inscription in the Hall of Justice facing the Judge is:

Your living and maintenance
Are taken from the sweat and blood of the people,
You can easily oppress the masses,
But you cannot deceive Heaven.

The magistrate or judge is more or less a consultant on legal and technical matters. The head of each family exercises control over its members, and usually acts as envoy-plenipotentiary to assume obligations and to settle differences with other families. Improper conduct is much more swiftly and effectively punished in the family court than in an official court. The personal example of the ruler, be he magistrate or the head of a family, is often more influential than the power he wields. A recent example is Wu Pei-fu. Though stripped of actual political power, he has exerted great political influence simply because he possesses the ethical attributes of a scholar.

Unlike modern nationalism, the Chinese nation has for its objective the contentment of the individual rather than the development of sovereignty, or the destiny of the state. In fact, the doctrine of sovereignty, or the state, is not in Chinese political thought. The K'ung-Meng school proceeds from the perfection of the individual to the ordered family, to the well-administered nation, and to a peaceful world through the five human relations and not through political organization. The Chinese term for nation is kuo-chia which means a territory of families. Hence the age old proverb of the Chinese farmer:

When the sun rises, I toil;
When the sun sets, I rest;
I dig wells for water;
I till the fields for food;
What has the emperor's power
to do with me?

Contrary to the popular conception in the West "war-lords" are just as alien to the Chinese political background as modern nationalism. To the individualistic or familistic Chinese people, militarism is the worst form of oppression. The sages have always exalted learning and learned men. The influence of Buddhistic pantheism has created in the mind of the average man the sacredness of all life and the horror of taking life. The classical examination system which was in operation for almost two thousand years required almost no knowledge of military tactics but a thorough-going intellectual training. All these and other factors have helped to mold the temperament of the Chinese people in such a way that they as individuals are less pugilistic and as a group still less militaristic. In the place of force, therefore, they have evolved an elaborate system in their

mores and traditions that tend to ease emotional outbursts between persons and to lubricate social friction between groups. "Face-saving" is but one out of many such devices.

Before the nineteenth century the Chinese nation had been more or less a confederation of self-contained and self-governed communities which had been held together, not so much by political machinery, but by bonds of common literature, tradition, and a social structure of guilds and families. In the nineteenth century China was brought suddenly into actual contact with the modern western political states. After a series of defeats at war, she was compelled to seek the secret of power of the modern West. At first she thought it was something in the modern army and navy. She put her soldiers and sailors through the goose-step, put western uniforms on them, and placed in their hands modern armament, and expected them to put up a modern western fight in war. It did not work. Then she thought it was something in modern industry. So railways and steamships and factories were built on western models. But the progress was too slow to save the country. Then she thought it was the form of government. Hence the movement for constitutional monarchy was followed by the movement for a republic. In 1911 the New Republican Government decreed that cues should be done away with, that frock coats should take the place of mandarin coats, and that the nation should henceforth be governed by a republican form of government based on a constitution that combined the merits of those of France and the United States. Once more the leaders, as well as the people, became disillusioned because so far the changes had been changes of names and appearances, half-hearted at that, while old China remained unwieldy and unchanged.

It was not until after the failure of the first republican revolution of 1911 became apparent that some Chinese leaders actually saw what must be done to change China. They started immediately to destroy the intellectual obstacles to the process of modernization. They attacked and demolished mercilessly the K'ung-Meng school of thought and the thousand and one traditions, ethical patterns, and social structures, resulting from that school and other stabilizing but enslaving influences, such as the K'ung codes of ethics, the literary language, and the family system.

In the political sphere, the new nationalist movement aimed at an equally fundamental revolution. Prior to 1911, Sun Wen (Sun Yat-

sen) had believed that the Manchu regime was the greatest obstacle to political reform, and had directed all his efforts to overthrow the Ch'ing dynasty. Events during the years following the revolution of 1911 proved that the Manchu regime was but one of the obstacles. The people were not ready for a centralized republican form of government. A few military governors of the old regime, who commanded hired armies, assumed control of the provinces. They had no understanding of the real meaning of the revolution. The overthrow of the dynasty removed their object of political loyalty. So the newly established and not too healthy infant republic had to bargain with those military governors in order to survive. Yüan Shi-k'ai, the first president, was more or less successful for a short while in maintaining the authority of Central Government; but he was not a convert to modern democracy. The methods he employed in extending his personal power showed that "president" and "republic" were to him modern versions of emperor and dynasty. Between the time of his death in 1915 and the nationalist revolution of 1926, a few leaders of the old regime attempted to be president, while many others controlled the provinces as their personal spheres of influence. This period may be characterized as one of personal struggle among military leaders of the old regime.

During the period of personal struggle, Sun Wen and his followers saw more clearly than before that a more closely organized state was not possible without the spirit and mechanism of nationalism. He now realized more clearly that the people must be educated to feel that they were one and should act as one. This political oneness was the secret of the power of a modern state which itself had sovereignty, honor, and destiny even apart from any individual members of that state. Modern nationalism was as potent as a cult or religion. It had acquired dogmas, symbols, and gods. Nationalists would defend their state's sovereign rights, national flag, and strive to add to it glory and power.

Sun Wen had not made this discovery accidentally. Nor did he launch the nationalist movement on an impulse. He had given the movement serious thought and long study. In fact, he devoted a great deal of his time to reading recognized western authorities on law, government, and economics. He was eager to learn from the radicals as well as the conservatives, the communists or socialists, as well as the capitalists. His conclusions were profoundly influ-

enced by Chinese political philosophy and methods. He believed in democracy, but he made a difference between the right to be treated equally and the right to govern. "The government of a nation," he said, "must be built upon the rights of the people, but the administration of public affairs must be entrusted to experts." He took a deep interest in the improvement of the standard of living among peasants and workers, but was opposed to class dictatorship. He expanded on the traditional conception of cooperation between classes of people. His famous illustration was that a modern building could not be erected without an architect who drew the plan, a foreman who supervised the work, and a workman who did the manual labor. Each of them was indispensable. So, for the sake of erecting the building and for the benefit of all three they should cooperate. He advocated state control and development of resources and industries, but he found it impossible to accept Marxian socialism. It seemed apparent that while he was crystallizing his thinking in formulating a philosophical basis and practical program for the movement, he had constantly to deal with the Chinese background and the requirements of the modern state, the Chinese situation, and the inconclusive and limited experiences of western political science. In attempting this he had to pioneer into new fields. Perhaps some of the inconsistencies in his lectures could be thus explained. As a whole, his philosophy and program constituted a modern restatement of China's political aspirations and a modern plan to realize these aspirations.

The nationalist movement, briefly, was to reconstruct a new understanding, a new physical environment, and social relationship. The people were to be educated to learn how to exercise the powers and privileges of a democracy. Their standard of living was to be elevated so that none needed to live on the verge of starvation. The new society was to be more organized, so that individual wishes would be more subject to state well-being. All this involved the overcoming of the tremendous inertia of the traditional Chinese political individualism and *laissez-faire* attitude. The problem was made more difficult because of the inadequacy of the physical basis for a modern state, such as modern means of communication, also because of the group of "war-lords" who were by-products of the recent disorganization and who could not fit into the new scheme of things. Therefore, the movement was compelled to use certain stimuli strong

enough to shake to its foundation the political inertia and to substitute a new incentive for the new state.

Since the Opium War China had been repeatedly defeated by foreign powers which had established concessions and settlements in China and had deprived her of some of her territories, resources, and sovereign rights. Because of their *laissez-faire* attitude, the Chinese people as a whole had not been conscious of such foreign aggression. The Nationalists began a campaign to create patriotism by making the people conscious of the wrongs and humiliations brought upon them by foreign powers. Second, there must be inculcated in the people a more aggressive and positive attitude toward life. Thus, a deliberate attempt was made to overthrow the old religious and philosophical attitude of passiveness, moderation, and toleration. The death of Sun Wen in 1925 resulted in the creation of a most powerful symbol for the new national unity. Sun Wen has justly become the national hero whose life exemplifies unselfishness, courage, intelligent industry, and devotion to the cause of his country and whose teachings became the adopted principles and sacred testament of the nationalist movement and party.

In 1926 the Nationalist Party began to carry out the first step of the national revolution; that is, to unify China through military expeditions. It achieved success quickly because of a number of contributing factors. In the first place, the nationalist movement had reached all parts of China. Second, the life and teachings of Sun Wen had inspired a new hope and loyalty. Finally, the party utilized Russian experts in helping to organize a modern army and political machinery. The split within the party in 1927 caused a temporary setback. Soon the conservative wing of the party consolidated and succeeded in ousting their communist allies and established the National Government at Nanking.

In 1917, when the first republican revolution succeeded, Sun Wen went to the temple of Ming T'ai-tsu, founder of the Ming dynasty and a nationalist hero, to pay respects to that great spirit in behalf of the nation. In 1928, General Chiang Kai-shek represented the Nationalists in reporting the successful conclusion of the military revolution to the spirit of Sun Wen. This dramatic incident signified the beginning of a new era. The traditional political individualism and *laissez-faire* were no longer tenable. The Nationalists were now obliged to turn their attention to the next two stages—po-



Courtesy of White Brothers.

SUN WEN'S MAUSOLEUM AT NANKING

litical tutelage and constitutional government—in order to realize fully the Three People's Principles—the People's Livelihood, the People's Democracy, and the People's Nationalism.

Space does not permit me to go into details as to the history and organization of the Nationalist Party (Kuo-min-tang) and the National Government. Suffice it to state here that during the period of political tutelage the party is the official organ for the political education of the people. The people are taught gradually to understand and to exercise their constitutional rights. Before they are able to do so, the party assumes the direction and supervision of the government. The National Government is divided into five *Yüan*—the executive, legislative, judicial, examination, and the control. The first three correspond to the usual divisions of a western republic and form of government. Civil service examination has always been regarded as a most important function of the government. The Nationalists have modernized the procedure and made it one of the five supreme divisions of the government in line with this tradition and also with Sun Wen's principle of securing experts to administer public affairs. In the traditional government of China there has always been a board of censors whose duty has been to detect corruption and to criticize lack of duty by government officials. The Central *Yüan* is intended to perform the same functions in a modern government through its powers to impeach and to audit.

The National Government has not had an easy task in attempting to reach the objectives of the nationalist movement and the party. In some respects it is considered to have fallen short of its idealistic declarations. For instance, the unequal treaties have not been entirely abrogated. There are still disturbances in some parts of the country, and the problems of the people's livelihood have not all been solved. But no fair criticism can be made of any government without taking into consideration the conditions under which it has to operate. Considering, for example, the immensity of the territory and population it has to deal with, as well as famines and floods, foreign aggression, and other baffling difficulties, the National Government must be given due credit for many accomplishments.

In the first place, it has done much toward making itself a government of the people. Since 1927 it has not borrowed a cent from abroad, but has relied entirely upon domestic loans for government financing. In spite of the economic depression it has been able to

balance its budget. This unusual achievement has not only restored the confidence of the people in the Government, but it has also made possible cooperation between the Government and the people who have become partners in governmental affairs.

Foundations have been laid for the realization of the Three People's Principles. Laws have been promulgated and courts established, which have taken cognizance of the progressive legal and judicial tendencies in the West. The monetary problem has been carefully studied by experts, and gradual steps have been taken to stabilize currency and exchange. This and the establishment of the Central Bank have strengthened the Government's credit at home and abroad despite adverse circumstances.

In foreign relations the achievements of the National Government have been impressive. Tariff autonomy was recovered during the first two years of its administration. In the meantime, steps were taken to abolish extraterritoriality. Several treaties based on equality and reciprocity have been concluded. A number of powers have restored to China concessions and leased territories. The vitality of the Government was formally recognized by the members of the League of Nations which elected China to be a member of the Council of the League in 1931.

True to its traditions, the Government has been actively interested in research and higher learning. The Academia Sinica was founded in 1928 for the purpose of research in physics, chemistry, engineering, geology, astronomy, meteorology, history and philology, literature, archaeology, psychology, education, social science, zoology, and botany.

In conclusion it must be pointed out that on account of its peculiar background the development of the Chinese nation has not been so much influenced by or dependent upon political readjustments as that of a modern western nation. In spite of disturbances in some areas (which usually receive an undeserved share of attention in the West), the Chinese people have been making steady progress in material reconstruction. They have been rapidly developing civil aviation and building motor roads, about 35,000 miles of which have been built during this decade. In steamship transportation and in manufacturing they are emerging from a period of complete foreign control to a position of dominance.

The international situation has exerted and will continue to exert influence which will mold the political future of China. So far Chi-

nese nationalism has been moderated by the traditional background of the people. For instance, although their consciousness of nationality is young, it contains no element of narrow-mindedness, and although militarists still sway great power, the people do not believe in militarism or military dictatorship. They still believe in to live and let live. Developments in the Far East during the last year and a half are alarming to those who thought that the new order had arrived. If the Chinese people are not left alone to work out freely their political destiny and if the world's peace machinery proves impotent to guarantee to them this freedom, they may be compelled to undergo a second childhood in reverting to the short-cut method of dictatorship and militarism in their struggle for survival.